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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- 11. Mideast
- 12. Anti-Terrorism Efforts
- 13. Iran

Key stories in the media:

The media reported that yesterday PM Benjamin Netanyahu expressed

cautious optimism that talks with the Palestinians will soon resume. "In recent weeks, I've had the impression there is a certain change in atmosphere, and I hope that a maturation that would enable the negotiating process to move forward has occurred," he told a meeting of his Likud faction at the Knesset. HaQaretz quoted officials in the Prime Minister's Office as saying that Netanyahu was particularly encouraged by yesterday's meeting between PA President Mahmoud Abbas and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. For weeks, Abbas has been insisting that he will not resume negotiations unless Israel completely freezes construction in West Bank settlements and in East Jerusalem. But at Monday's meeting, Abbas repeatedly said that he would postpone any decision on whether or not to restart the talks until he sees what happens during next week's visit to Washington by two senior Egyptian officials, Foreign Minister Ahmed Abu al-Gheit and intelligence chief Omar Suleiman. HaQaretz cited the belief of Israeli officials that Abbas will agree to resume the talks after that visit, or else after U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Peace Senator George Mitchell's visit a few days later.

However, they predicted, he will first try to wrest as many guarantees as possible from the U.S. administration. Nevertheless, in an interview with the Palestinian News Agency after his meeting with Mubarak, Abbas reiterated that his view on the need for a complete settlement freeze has not changed. A senior member of the Palestinian negotiating team also told HaQaretz yesterday that Abbas' demand for a freeze on construction in East Jerusalem has not changed -- a precondition for which Abbas enjoys considerable support in the Arab world. Abbas insisted that he was not seeking any American guarantees beyond this. "We don't want guarantees; we want a clear, well-prepared basis for negotiations," he said.

However, HaQaretz quoted Palestinian sources as saying that in practice he apparently plans to insist that this "basis" include a guarantee that talks will resume at the point at which they left off under Netanyahu's predecessor, Ehud Olmert. Maariv reported that the Egyptian Foreign Ministry's spokesman, Hossam Zaki, confirmed the existence of an American peace plan providing for Palestinian statehood in two years. HaQaretz quoted Zaki as saying that the Abbas-Mubarak meeting focused on an Egyptian proposal for reviving the talks that includes a promise of a Palestinian state within two years and American letters of assurance to both Israel and the PA about the nature of the final-status agreement. Netanyahu, at his meeting with Likud MKs, also stressed that the current flurry of diplomatic activity is focused solely on ideas for reviving the talks. Commenting on reports in the press about various concessions he has allegedly agreed to make on final-status issues, he said, "The peace plans that are being ascribed to me in the media are untrue." "We are serious in our intention to reach a peace agreement, but we will insist that the outcome of the negotiations be determined at the negotiating table," he continued. "Israel is ready for negotiations with the PA without preconditions." At a meeting Monday with special Quartet envoy Tony Blair, Netanyahu urged the international community to press Abbas to resume the talks. "We must start talking," he said. "The international community must refrain from taking steps that are liable to cause the Palestinian side to harden its positions. Instead, everyone must act in a way that will encourage the Palestinians to return to negotiations."

The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel's top decision-makers are against discussing the border issue first in future negotiations with the Palestinians. The newspaper and other media outlets said there have been reports of a U.S. interest in solving the border issue within the next nine months, before the end of the construction moratorium in the settlements, so it would be clear afterward where Israel could and could not build. However, The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior official in Jerusalem as saying that the problem with that approach is that it would mean Israel relinquishing land and settlements without getting anything in return, and then having to begin discussing the more difficult issues of Jerusalem, refugees, and the demilitarization of a future Palestinian state. "In this case you give up territorial assets, and what have you done?" asked the official. "You haven't ended the conflict, and haven't dealt with refugees or Jerusalem. This idea is a nonstarter for all the ministers, from Left or Right." The official was quoted as saying that from Jerusalem's point of view, the idea that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed must be the guiding principle in future talks, just as it has been in previous rounds.

The Jerusalem Post reported that unlike Netanyahu, FM Avigdor Lieberman expressed pessimism yesterday about the possibility of talks with the Palestinians achieving results in the near future even if they do resume. "It will not be possible to reach a complete agreement in two years," Lieberman warned Blair during his meeting with the envoy. "It is not a realistic target. We must begin direct talks without committing to any deadline. In the past, we have set deadlines that were not kept and it led to violence."

This morning Israel Radio reported that Hamas will soon give its reply, including reservations, to Israel's offer regarding the prisoner exchange swap. The radio quoted Moussa Abu Marzouk, the Damascus-based deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, as saying that the German mediator has not produced the desired result despite his efforts and that Israel has changed its stance.

HaQaretz reported that the cabinet has instructed the IDF to issue gas masks to all citizens. The original plan called for just 60 percent of the population to receive protection kits. The newspaper reported that a major biological attack drill is slated to be held next week in the greater Tel Aviv region.

Yediot reported that Israel canceled a visit to the U.K. by a delegation of senior IDF officers after the British authorities announced that they would be unable to promise that the officers will not be arrested. Israel Radio reported on an emerging solution to the problem, according to which the General Prosecution in Britain will have to back up local magistrate's courts' demands to arrest foreigners accused of war crimes. Media reported that Patricia Janet Scotland, Baroness Scotland of Asthal, the Attorney General for England and Wales and Northern Ireland, a ministerial position in the UK Government, is about to visit Israel for talks with legal officials, in a bid to resolve the problem. Israel Radio quoted an Israeli official cognizant with the talks with the British authorities as saying that it is unconceivable that laws originally intended to stop Nazi war criminals should be used against Israelis.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Shin Bet is considering beefing up its teams of security guards stationed at Ben Gurion Airport and on Israeli commercial flights.

The media cited expressions of anger by Arab Knesset Members vis-a-vis settlers and the IDF. Yesterday at a session of the Knesset's Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee, MK Taleb a-Sanaa (United Arab List-Ta'al) called settlers a "malignant tumor", setting off a flurry of furious reactions from the assembled Knesset members. HaQaretz reported that the IDF has denied allegations that it trains its canines to attack anybody heard saying: "Allah hu akbar," Arabic for "God is great." Speculations of such practices were exposed first by Israel Radio's military correspondent, Carmela Menashe, and echoed by Israeli Arab MK Ahmed Tibi (United Arab List-Ta'al).

Yediot and Maariv reported that an Israeli defense delegation headed by National Security Adviser Uzi Arad left for India on Sunday for a strategic dialogue. The newspapers reported that the sides will discuss the Iranian and terror issues.

II. Mideast:

Block Quotes:

II. QWeakness Is an Asset

Former Mossad Director Ephraim Halevy wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (1/5): "We should relate to the threat made by the Palestinian President at the end of last week, who said that if Israel were to continue its actions such as the killing of the murderers of Rabbi Hai, the PA would have to reexamine the security cooperation between Israel and the PA. This is an empty threat both on the political and the security level: if the partial cooperation that exists today stops, Israel will have no interest in allowing the U.S. to continue strengthening the PA militarily. The units that the Americans are training with Jordanian assistance and with Israel's consent mainly act to suppress the Hamas opposition in

Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank] and thus safeguard Abu Mazen's regime. Without this security cooperation, the PA will collapse. In the course of the last few months Abu Mazen was able to leverage his weakness and the weakness of the PA into an asset, so much so that the U.S. made his perpetual strengthening by Israel into an essential condition for renewing Jerusalem's diplomatic dialogue with it. The Palestinian President's language of threats against Israel of last week should persuade even the Obama administration, as well as the Israeli Government, that the expiry date on this policy has passed.

II. QTime to Talk

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (1/5): QThe peace process between Israel and the Palestinians has become an empty phrase since Israel's elections, interchangeable with the word Qdaydreaming.Q On the Israeli side, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted on conditions that will prevent a renewal of the process such as Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, or not freezing construction in East Jerusalem. On the Palestinian side, President Mahmoud Abbas has insisted on freezing all Israeli construction over the Green Line, even after Washington gave Israel Qdiscounts.Q Over the past few days, a crack seems to be opening in the ice, and the peace process has a chance to be revived. Netanyahu met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, presented the outlines of a plan, and was even praised by the Egyptian foreign ministry. Abbas is also willing to move ahead; reports from his visits to Saudi Arabia and Egypt indicate that he is ready to be more flexible in his conditions. These positive signs must be encouraged, because when peace talks are frozen they are replaced by another, more threatening and dangerous dialogue.... This calm can flourish if it is nourished by the hope of a better future. A lack of diplomatic prospects could generate a new wave of terror.... Abbas and Netanyahu must sweep away preconditions to renew the talks, even if such conditions are justified. A construction freeze in the settlements, even if it is not total, and adopting the two-state principle are appropriate incentives to get the Palestinians back to the table. Palestinian security control of the West Bank is the QgoodsQ Israel has always demanded. Now is the time to resuscitate the Roadmap's other conditions and begin a new stage in the peace process.

III. QEmpty Talk

Liberal columnist and television anchor Ofer Shelach wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (1/5): QWhen any of the government leaders are asked why make a pretense of talking, they shrug their shoulders and talk about tactics. QThe process must be maintained, and Qwe have to provide hope,Q mainly to look good in Washington. About the assumption that ultimately the ongoing frustration will lead to another round of violence, they respond with a shrug of the shoulders: in any case, among the government and the public on both sides, the majority views events in terms of an almost eternal conflict, and all that is left is to control when it blows up. And only the people who die in the next five years and afterwards, it is only for them that this whole business is more than empty talk.

IV. QWhere Is Netanyahu Leading To?

Deputy Editor-in-Chief Uri Elitzur, who was director of the Prime Minister's Office during Netanyahu's first term, wrote in the editorial of the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (1/5): QThere are mounting signs that a far-reaching political deal is being concocted, and that it will involve an Israeli withdrawal from nearly all of Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank].... Not only has the public not been given real information about the Prime Minister's position, but the cabinet ministers do not know in which direction Netanyahu wants to lead Israel. Either way, this is cause for great concern. If Netanyahu, indeed, has changed his spots and has become a true believer in Yossi Beilin's idea of two states, that constitutes utter bankruptcy of the national camp and will be yet another instance in which a Likud prime minister has stolen the will of his voters and has used deceit to have their votes serve a left wing agenda. And if Netanyahu is merely playing a tactical game that is geared to prove to the world that it is impossible to reach an agreement because the Arab side isn't interested in peace, that is a very dangerous game that is being played on a very slippery slope that could end with an avalanche.

IV. QDCQs Open Arms

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (1/5): QIt is fitting ... to acknowledge the ongoing aid Israel receives from the United States. It may not come out of purely altruistic motives, yet Washington's intentions are largely good, and absent its unwavering military and diplomatic backing, the world would be an even lonelier place for our Jewish state.... Especially at a time when Americans are hurting economically, this financial support to Israel is deeply appreciated. In light of our shared values and mutual interests, the American people should know that they can always count on Israel. Israelis also recognize that America has interests elsewhere in our region.... But the sale of weapons to Egypt is the hardest to fathom.... The Pentagon insists none of this will Qadversely affect the military balance in the regionQ.... Since 1975, America has invested \$14.83 billion in a wide array of AID projects to make Egypt a better place for its people. Helping ordinary Egyptians is where Washington's emphasis can continue to do the most good. Adding to Egypt's considerable stockpile of weapons hardly benefits its people. And such weapons could, heaven forbid, one day fall into the wrong hands.

¶2. Anti-Terrorism Efforts:

Block Quotes:

QThe American Air Farce

U.S.-based columnist Shmuley Boteach wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (1/5): Q[Here] is the level of farce that passes for airport security here in the United States.... Just a few days [after the attempted bombing of an American airliner over Detroit], one of New York's three premiere airports [Newark Liberty] is shut down because a man walked straight through a QsecureQ exit without being stopped. Nice to know we're being protected by the Keystone Kops.... Israel has the most secure airport in the world. I cannot imagine for a moment that a man with nitroglycerine in his undies would ever have made it on an Israeli plane.... What Israel excels at is not even ethnic profiling so much as psychological profiling.... Israel, after all, often dispatches humanitarian rescue teams to various parts of the world after an earthquake or tsunami. Why not immediately dispatch a high-level security team to Washington to advise an increasingly hapless Homeland Security Administration about the right way to deploy limited resources in securing a vast air network? I realize that Israel is a tiny country and has to secure only one major airport. But then again, unlike the U.S., it lives surrounded by terrorists yet has an exemplary record in protecting air travel.

¶3. Iran:

Block Quotes:

QThe Americans Are Leading to a Disaster

Yisrael Yosefi, a settler and former Mossad official, wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (1/5): QThe military option against Iran has been ruled out: in ObamaQs vehement speech upon accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, in which he talked about Qjust wars,Q he did not mean Iran but Afghanistan.... [In a subsequent meeting with European Union officials, Defense Secretary Robert] Gates explained [approximate rendering]: QIn order to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, weQll offer it a package of incentives and deterrence that will convince the Iranian administration that it is less safe with nuclear weapons than without them.Q One may surmise that Gates meant a nuclear-free Middle East. In this situation, the Americans will demand that Israel destroy all its nuclear weapons in exchange for an Iranian pledge to stop its accelerated development of uranium enrichment.... I suggest a few possibilities: first, to take the masses into the street with a call to prevent a new Holocaust; second, to recruit

Jewish opinion in the world and explain to it that, should Israel be annihilated, this would influence the security of every Jew; third, to convince the U.S. Congress that the Shihab-6 missile with which the Iranians will ultimately threaten the United States; and lastly, that the destruction of all Iranian nuclear installations must be accepted by the world as a just war.

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